

# Dock and the Darwin Debate in Greece\*

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A man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into a Cosmos.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Carlyle

Charles Darwin (1809–1882)

The year 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his *Origin of Species*, an event which provoked an enormous response in many countries and in many fields, including literature. It is a good time, then, to consider its impact on Greek creative writing. This paper examines a thirteen stanza poem “Δαρβίνος” (“Darwin”), published in 1882, and signed with the

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<sup>1</sup> Roppen (1956:66) cites this text written by Thomas Carlyle profiling a pessimistic Alfred Tennyson, who not only had anticipated Darwinism in his poetry but had continued to respond to it in the post-*Origin* period. The text was written in 1842 in a letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

pseudonym Dock. I argue that this poem is about Charles Darwin and offers a perspective on the impact his evolutionary theory had on society. How does this poem respond to Darwin's theory? How does it relate to other European attitudes to Darwin in the late nineteenth century? How does it address issues such as the evolution of the human species and the relation between science and religion, which are still topics of passionate debate? And, last but not least, who was the elusive Dock?

This paper is derived from a small part of my doctoral thesis.<sup>2</sup> I will be examining here my English translation of a thirteen stanza Greek poem entitled “Δαρβίνοϋς” (“Darwin”),<sup>3</sup> which was published in 1882 in the Greek literary periodical *Μη Χάνεσαι* (translated as *Don't Get Lost*) and signed in English with the pseudonym Dock (Dock, 1882:4–5). I will also provide in parallel the original Greek version of the poem. The poem was published in May of 1882 and the naturalist Charles Darwin (born 1809) had died just a month before on 19 April. So this poem appears to be a memorial to him.

Why investigate what appears at first glance to be a rather curious poem on Darwin and a perspective on his ideas? Throughout history humanity has constantly pondered the origins of life's existence, documentation ranging from creation myths to quasi-scientific and scientific accounts. These include: creation myths which have been noted in many cultures, such as in the early literary works of the ancient Greek poets Homer and Hesiod (seventh century BC); quasi-scientific work such as the nineteenth-century monographs of Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck and Herbert Spencer, as well as the currently controversial ideas of Intelligent Design; and scientific theories such as the topic at hand, that is, Darwinism.

In addition, the year 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the 1859 publication of his key book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (Darwin, [1859] 1985). For this reason, also, the impact of Darwin's ideas on Greek literature should be assessed.<sup>4</sup> This paper goes towards addressing a significant gap in the modern Greek literary scholarship that examines responses to Darwinian and post-Darwinian ideas in Greek literature.

<sup>2</sup> The thesis is entitled *The Influence of Darwinism and Evolutionism in Modern Greek Literature: The Case of Grigorios Xenopoulos* (Zarimis, 2007b). It not only investigates Darwinian and other evolutionary thought in early twentieth-century writings of Xenopoulos but also explores the work of other modern Greek writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>3</sup> In all the Greek texts I have chosen to use only the monotonic accent system. In addition, I have maintained the spelling of the original text.

<sup>4</sup> I have discussed in other papers and my thesis the gap in the literary scholarship on Darwinian ideas in modern Greek literature. See Zarimis, 2007a:394–396.

The poem is probably one of the earliest pieces of Greek poetry which deals with Darwinian ideas and it provides an insight into the reception of Darwinism in Greece in the early 1880s. Internationally, Darwin's theories produced an enormous response in many disciplines including literature. In Greece, however, poetry responses to Darwinism such as this are uncommon. While analysing this poem, I found not only that it reflected the ideas circulating in Greece in academic circles post-*Origin of Species*, but that it was representative of the poetry responses to Darwinism seen in other western countries at around that time. Hence this substantial poem which ponders Darwin's ideas should be placed in the context of other such international literature. Beyond this, I investigated this poem because I wanted to find the identity of its creator.

## Background and analysis

On the international scene, the first literary responses to Darwinism came earlier than 1882, which indicates that this poetic response was somewhat delayed. This is because the general reception of Darwinism in Greece occurred later there than in most western countries. Darwin's 1859 *Origin of Species* was only translated into Greek in 1915 by Nikos Kazantzakis (Krimbas, 1993:101; Zarimis, 2007a:394–395). It was only those scholars who could read it in the original English or in other languages, such as in the French or German translations of 1862, who were able to read it earlier than 1915. Note however that Greek periodicals were publishing essays and biographies on Darwin in the 1870s.

The poem is written in the demotic (or spoken) Greek instead of the katharevousa (puristic) Greek that had been the vogue till then. The demotic was not common then for any literary work which may have been associated with science. It was however typical of the poetry which characterised the work of certain Greek poets known as the "New Generation of the 1880s" (Valetas, 1981). Further to this, this type of poetry, frequently found in the radical *Μη Χάνεσαι*, took on a fresher and more entertaining approach to political, social or scientific ideas than the poetry of previous years.

With the examination of the poem I take on a thematic approach which has been commonly used by commentators such as Gillian Beer in literary work pertaining to science, and in particular, evolution.<sup>5</sup> The themes used in western literature, in the aftermath of the publication of the *Origin of Species* and which are present in this poem are: religion versus science; progress in society; the origins of humanity; the struggle for existence; and immortality.

To begin with the first stanza:

<sup>5</sup> See Beer, 1999. Other relevant works utilising this approach include Roppen, 1956; Stevenson, [1932], 1963; Zarimis, 2007b.

## 1

Θέλω το μέγα πνεύμα σου Δαρβίνε, να υμνήσω  
 όμως ο νους μου σταματά στο τόσο μεγαλείο:  
 Αντί εμπρός, η πένα μου ζητά να στρέψη οπίσω,  
 Σαν άλογο που μυριστή στο δρόμο του θηρίου,  
 Ή νοιώση άβυσσο εκεί π' ατάραχο βαδίζει,  
 Και στέκεται, και χλιμαντρά κι αδιάκοπα αφρίζει!

## 1

Darwin I want to praise your great spirit  
 But my mind stops at such grandeur:  
 Instead of forward, my pen wants to turn back,  
 Like a horse which senses a beast on its course,  
 Or perceives an abyss there where it calmly treads,  
 And it stands, and neighs and froths incessantly!

(my translation)

The poet is in awe of Darwin but there is a sense of trepidation surfacing in these lines, almost like a sense of warning. This suggests that the poet fully appreciated the shattering impact that Darwin's theory of evolution had on intellectual ideas.

In 1878, only a few years before the publication of this poem, German-born Theodor von Heldreich (1822–1902), the prominent hellenised botanist, wrote in French to Charles Darwin on the reception of Darwinism in Greece at the time, and also on Darwin's fervent supporters:

[...] οι οποίοι είναι ακόμα αρκετά σπάνιοι στην Ελλάδα. Δεν είναι απαλλαγμένο κάποιου κινδύνου και χρειάζεται αρκετό ηθικό θάρρος για να ομολογεί κανείς και να αποδέχεται τις αρχές σας σ' αυτή τη χώρα, όπου ακόμα βρισκόμαστε υπό την κυριαρχία του δογματισμού. Πρέπει βαθμιαία να προετοιμαστούν τα πνεύματα και με προφύλαξη, μολαταύτα η Αλήθεια θα θριαμβεύσει ακόμα και εδώ, και πρέπει να ελπίζουμε ότι αυτή η μέρα δεν θα 'ναι πολύ απόμακρη (Krimbas' translation from the French in Krimbas, 1993:107).

[...] who are still quite rare in Greece. It is not free from some danger and it requires some courage of one's convictions to acknowledge and accept the principles of your work in this country, where we still find ourselves under the rule of dogmatism. Minds must gradually be prepared with caution; nevertheless the Truth will triumph even here, and we must hope that day will not be too far away (my translation from Krimbas).

In this milieu we can understand the poet hiding behind a pseudonym. We need to bear in mind however that pseudonyms were very commonly used by Greek writers for various reasons, such as for masking their ideological or political views. Krimbas shows that by 1879 Darwinism in Greece had an impact not just on general biology, but also more specifically on the branches of zoology, phytology, anatomy, embryology and anthropology as well as ethnology, philosophy and psychology (Krimbas, 1993:92). In stanzas two and three Dock appears to question Darwin's identity:

## 2

Ν' αρχίσω πώς; ποιο όνομα αρμόζει να σου δώσω;  
 Να σ' ονομάσω άνθρωπο, θεό, ψυχή, σκουλήκι;  
 Στο γαλαζένιο ουρανό το νου μου να σηκώσω,  
 Ή μήπως κρύβεσαι βαθιά στη γη σαν το μερμήκι;  
 Να σε ζητήσω σ' άγρια της ερημιάς θηρία,  
 Ή στων πουλιών τη μαγική, Δαρβίνε, μελωδία;

## 2

How should I start? What name befits you?  
 Should I name you man, god, soul, worm?  
 Should I raise my mind to the azure sky,  
 Or maybe you are hiding deep in the earth like an ant?  
 Should I seek you among the wild beasts of the desert,  
 Or, Darwin, amongst the birds' magical melody?  
 (my translation)

## 3

Μη βρίσκεσαι μέσ' την υγρή της θάλασσας αγκάλη,  
 Σαν αστακός, σαν φάλαινα, σα στρείδι, σα γαρίδα;  
 Ή μήπως το κεφάλι σου μέσ' τα φυτά προβάλλη  
 Σαν μενεξές, σαν ανανάς, σα ρόκα, σαν τσουκνίδα;  
 Άνοιξ' ακόμα μια στιγμή το στόμα σου και κλείσε  
 Να μας ειπής, είσαι καπνός, σκιά, πνοή, τι είσαι;

## 3

Could you be found in the waters of the sea's open arms?  
 Like a lobster, like a whale, like an oyster, like a prawn?  
 Or maybe your head emerges in the plants  
 Like a violet, like a pineapple, like rocket, like a bed of nettles?  
 Open your mouth again for a moment and close it,  
 Tell us, are you smoke, shade, breath, what are you?  
 (my translation)

In these two stanzas the poet is aligning Darwin to a Darwinian world which is representative of living and non-living matter. Dock is questioning the origins of humanity. This world is seen here to reflect an omnipresent entity which alludes to some form of pantheism. This will be discussed further later in this paper. In stanza four Dock acknowledges the application to humanity of Darwin's theory of common descent and our origins from the sea:

## 4

Σα σκούληκας μέσα στις γης τα έγκατα τρυπώνεις,  
 Ή στα βαθιά της θάλασσας σαν βουτηχτής γυρίζεις.

## 4

Εκεί από τα σπλάχνα της έν' άτομο ξεχώνεις  
 Και κόσμο νέο με αυτό και συ, Δαρβίνε, κτίζεις!  
 Ωσάν ταχυδακτυλουργός σπείρεις σε χίλιους τόπους  
 Ψάρια, πουλιά και ερπετά, θηρία και ανθρώπους!

4

Like a worm within the earth's depths you burrow,  
 Or in the depths of the sea like a diver you wander.  
 There from the sea's flesh you dig up an individual  
 And, Darwin, a new world with this you build!  
 Like a conjuror you sow in a thousand places  
 Fish, birds and reptiles, beasts and man!

(my translation)

The last three lines exhibit a technique which was commonly used in the literature of the period, especially in poetry; this was to render Darwin's theory absurd by making the process of transformation from one species to another seem like magic. This of course intensified the satirical nature of the passage or poem (Beer, 1999:271). This will be discussed later. In *The Origin of Species* Darwin hesitated to state explicitly that humanity shared a common progenitor with all lower life. It was not until his second key book *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, which he published in 1871, that he delivered his message of humanity's gradual evolution from lower life forms (Darwin, [1871] 1981). This of course was seen as contradicting the literal biblical creationist view of humankind. Dock succinctly relays this interpretation to us in stanza five:

5

Θυμούμαι, όταν μάθαινα, μικρό παιδί ακόμα  
 Πως ο Θεός μας έπλασε τη γη εις έξ ημέρες:  
 Πως είπε να γενή το φως του πλάστου μας το στόμα  
 Κι ύστερα έπλασε μ' αυτό τον ήλιο, τους αστέρας:  
 Έπλασε ζώα και φυτά—και μην κανείς ξεχάση  
 Πως τελευταίο άφησε τον άνθρωπο να πλάση...

5

I remember, when I was learning, still a small child  
 That our God created the earth in six days:  
 That our creator's mouth said "Let there be light"  
 And with this he then formed the sun, the stars:  
 He created animals and plants—and don't anyone forget  
 That he left man to create last of all...

(my translation)

Although this poem was written 125 years ago the issue of creationism is still controversial in the United States, the UK, Australia and Europe and has been reinvented in the form of Intelligent Design (ID).<sup>6</sup> In stanza six there appears to be an attempt by Dock to affiliate Darwinism with God. It reads as follows:

6

Και βρίσκω τώρα πως πολύ οι δύο κόσμοι μοιάζουν,  
Πως ο πανάγαθος θεός και ο καλός Δαρβίνος  
Τον κόσμο από κάτι τι κι οι δυό κατασκευάζουν,  
Ο ένας από το μηδέν, απ' τη ζωή εκείνος...  
Αι, και θεό αν μέσα σου, φιλόσοφε, δεν κρύπτεις,  
Όμως αυτόν αληθινά εσύ αποκαλύπτεις!!

6

And I find now that the two worlds are very much alike,  
That both the most beneficent god and good Darwin  
Construct the world from something,  
The one from nothingness, from life the other...  
Ah philosopher, if within you don't hide a god,  
Nevertheless you truly do reveal him!!

(my translation)

In this stanza the poem focuses philosophically again on Darwinism. It says that although Darwinism is normally associated with atheism Dock believes that it actually reveals a pantheistic view. In the middle to late nineteenth century many intellectuals in western countries had taken up various forms of pantheism. This was primarily due to their traditional beliefs being shaken by the repercussions of the new evolutionary ideas. This included Greek literary writers such as Grigorios Xenopoulos and Kostas Palamas (Zarimis, 2007b).

Stanza seven states:

7

—Μα πώς, ρωτούν, ο τέλειος επλάσθη τελευταίος;  
Και άλλοι—πώς; ο άνθρωπος κατάγετ' από στρείδια;  
Και να! θρησκευτικός αγών βγαίνει στη μέση νέος,  
Και στο Δαρβίνο ρίχνονται οι ευλαβείς σαν φείδια!  
Μα για σταθήτε μια στιγμή, θεοσεβείς, σταθήτε,  
Αν αγαπάτε το θεό, τον Δάρβιν αν μισήτε!

7

“But how”, they ask, “was the perfect being created last?”  
And others, “What? Does man originate from oysters?”

<sup>6</sup> Other writers such as Xenopoulos dealt with the idea of creationism. See: Zarimis, 2007b; Zarimis, 2007c:251–252.

And see! A new religious struggle arises,  
 And the devout throw themselves like snakes at Darwin!  
 But wait a moment, pious ones, wait,  
 If you love god, if you hate Darwin!  
 (my translation)

In this stanza we see the schism which arose between the biblical assertion of the perfect creation of mankind and Darwin's theory of humanity's descent from lower forms. Dock saw then that the belief in the perfect design of a created world was a belief not compatible with the concept of evolution; these ideas are still debated today.

Despite Dock's attempts in stanza six to show similarities between the Darwinian world and the world of the traditional God, he goes on in stanza seven to reveal the presence of the religious war against Darwinism.<sup>7</sup> Note that he does not affiliate himself with the strong anti-Darwinian sentiments of those who, he says, are very religious. Moreover, it is very likely that Dock was well aware of the local disputes of the 1880s, when the pro-Darwinian lecturers from Philosophy and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Athens had been embroiled in disputes with the anti-Darwinian theologians from the Theological School regarding the teaching of Darwinism at university (Zarimis, 2007b:42–43, 107–108).<sup>8</sup>

Stanzas eight and nine state:

## 8

Ρίχνω το βλέμμα πίσω μου πενήντα τόσα χρόνια  
 Και βλέπω τον πλησίον μου μ' ένα ραβδί στο χέρι  
 Να ανεβαίνει τα βουνά, να περπατά στα χιόνια  
 Και τόσοσ δρόμος σπíti του το δόλιο να μην φέρη!  
 Σαν τον περιπλανώμενο γυρίζει πάντα μόνος,  
 Η ώρα μέρα γίνεται, κι η μέρα μήνας, χρόνος!...

## 8

I glance back fifty or so years  
 And I see my neighbour with a stick in hand  
 Ascending the mountains, walking in the snow  
 And all this walking doesn't bring the poor thing home!  
 Like a wanderer he travels around always on his own,  
 The hour becomes a day, and the day months, years!...

(my translation)

<sup>7</sup> In general the religious war against Darwinism has been well documented. See Zarimis, 2007b.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, evidence shows that the Eastern Orthodox Church did not take an official stand on evolutionary theory.



## 9

Τώρα γοργά σαν αστραπή βρίσκεται όπου θέλει,  
 Ξυπνάει στην ανατολή, βραδιάζει εις τη δύση,  
 Το λογισμό του κεραυνό, όπου θελήση στέλλει  
 Κι ακόμα εις τους ουρανούς ζητά να φτερουγίση!  
 Τέτοια κανένας στα παλῆα [sic] να ἔλεγε αν τολμούσε  
 Σωστά θα τον εσούβλιζαν, τρελλός αν δεν περνούσε.

## 9

Now quick as a flash he can be wherever he wants,  
 He wakes in the east, and night finds him in the west,  
 His thoughts, fast as a thunder bolt, wherever he wants he sends  
 And even in the skies he wants to fly!  
 If anyone dared to say such things in the past  
 They would truly have impaled him, if he wasn't considered mad.

(my translation)

In stanzas eight and nine, there is an attempt to appease the religious anti-Darwinism, by attempting to recognise an optimistic side of Darwinian evolution. Was not natural selection the motor of social progress and better adaptation? So was biological evolution analogous to the technological advancement of humanity which Dock mentions here? This idea of Darwinian progress was a common theme found in the poetry of, for instance, AC Swinburne and George Meredith (Stevenson, 1963). Finally, was Dock a poetical exponent of social Darwinism?

A key aspect of the poem is its ability to satirise aspects of Darwinian theory, such as the actual process of the evolution of living things, as is displayed in stanza ten. Dock's ability to specifically and extensively satirise Darwinism shows that he must have been well-versed in Darwin's theories. Satire in the Darwinian works of literary writers became a tool for questioning and probing the Darwinian ideas and also voicing the initial response to such seemingly absurd ideas. This was a very common literary technique used in the aftermath of the publication of the *Origin of Species*. That humanity arose from one or a few cells linking it to all lower life was a difficult premise to accept. So it was not unusual for creative writers, like Dock, to link man unilinearly to other animals in an absurd manner. Thus, in stanza seven the link is made with oysters, and in stanza ten this theme is taken up again:

## 10

Και τώρα πώς θαυμάζετε, αν από το σκουλήκι  
 Γεννήθηκε ο κωκωβίος, αν απ' αυτόν χελώνια,  
 Απ' της [sic] χελώνες οι αετοί, απ' τους αητούς οι λύκοι,  
 Από τους λύκους ερπετά, ύστερα τα πεπόνια,  
 Στους ουρανούς μας τα πτηνά, τ' ἄνθη στης γης το χώμα,  
 Κι απ' τους ανθούς και τα πτηνά ο ἄνθρωπος ακόμα;

10

And now how can you marvel, if from the worm  
Was born the goby fish, if from it tortoises,  
From tortoises the eagles, from eagles the wolves,  
From wolves the reptiles, then rockmelons,  
From our skies the birds, the blossoms from the earth's soil,  
And from blossoms and birds even man was born?

(my translation)

The anonymous Darwinian satirical poem entitled *Monkeyana* published in 1861 in the prominent English magazine *Punch* contains a similar stanza to this. It reads:

Let pigeons and doves  
Select their own loves,  
And grant them a million of ages,  
Then doubtless you'll find  
They've altered their kind,  
And changed into prophets and sages.

(anonymous, 1861, See Beer, 1999:275)

I return to Dock's poem, stanza eleven:

11

Και ζούνε άλλα, και πολλά από αυτά πεθαίνουν,  
Και άλλα μεταμόρφωσι παράδοξη λαμβάνουν,  
Μένουν τα δυνατότερα, τα ποιοί [sic]ωραία μένουν,  
Και τα παιδιά τη μάνα τους ένα καιρό ξεχάνουν!  
Ομοιάζει εργοστάσιο απέραντο η φύσις  
Που γίνεσαι για να χαθής, πεθαίνεις για να ζήσης...

11

And some things live, and many of these die,  
And others take on a strange transformation,  
The stronger ones remain, the finest ones remain,  
And the children at some time will forget their mothers!  
Nature resembles an endless factory  
Where you are created so you can vanish, you die so you can live...

(my translation)

This eleventh stanza continues with the theme of change introducing the Darwinian concepts of transformation, extinction and natural selection, the last of which is described in the poem as “the stronger ones remain, the finest ones remain”. Here Dock states that the strong survive to produce offspring which will carry their favourable characteristics. In doing so, evolution takes place with specific changes, hence “the

children at some stage will forget their mothers!” In other words, Dock is saying that they will have transformed into another species, different from their forebears. Perhaps he is attempting to evoke a sense of fear but, of course, he knows better and his message is relayed tongue in cheek. Reflected in the last line is the view that the individual finds his immortality — today we would probably say a form of genetic immortality — in the survival and evolutionary progress of the human race. This theme of immortality was utilised by poets such as Thomas Hardy and is seen in his poem “Heredity”, written circa 1904 (Morton, 1984:165–170, 196–200).<sup>9</sup>

Stanza twelve states:

12

Χιλιάδες έτυχε φοραίς, να ιδήτε, ποιό [sic] μεγάλη  
Μία σταλαγματιά νερού, τυριού κανένα θρίμμα [sic];  
Άι δεν γνωρίσατε εκεί του βίου μας την πάλη  
Στου κόσμου του αόρατου το κάθε ένα βήμα;  
Εκεί, εκεί θα νοιώσετε την αλληλοσφαγία,  
Εκεί την μεταμόρφωσι και τη δημιουργία...

12

You've happened a thousand times to see, magnified  
A drop of water, a crumb of cheese?  
Ah, didn't you recognise there our life's struggle?  
In the world of the unseen every single move?  
There, there you will understand the mutual destruction,  
There also the transformation and creation...

(my translation)

The first two lines are indicative of a writer who has had very frequent exposure to the microscope and so has worked or studied in science. The knowledge which he reveals in the remainder of this stanza is not something that would have been available outside the fields of science or medicine. In this stanza, for a validation of Darwinian evolution, the reader is cleverly directed to examine through a microscope the living world found in a drop of water or on a crumb of cheese. Dock sees a Darwinian microcosm of protozoa and other unicellular organisms exhibiting a struggle for existence, transformation and extinction. These are key tenets of Darwin's evolution, which Dock aligns with the human world, as we see in the next stanza where he also relates evolution to continuous change:

13

Όλα αλλάζουν, τίποτε αιώνιο δεν μένει,  
Ημέρα—νύχτα γίνεται δημιουργία νέα,

<sup>9</sup> The Darwinian Richard Dawkins also refers extensively to the gene as being immortal in his book *The Selfish Gene* of 1976.

Βαδίζουν' όλα, και κανέν το άλλο δεν προσμένει  
 Κι όλα κρατούν την **πρόοδο** στο χέρι τους σημαία...  
 Ναι, όλοι τρέχετε εμπρός, πάντοτε προχωρήτε,  
 Και μη σταθήτ' αν ο θεός δεν σας ειπή—*Σταθήτε!!*  
 (emphases in the original)

13

Everything changes, nothing remains forever,  
 New creation goes on night and day,  
 They all go on, and none waits for the other  
 And all hold **progress** in their hand like a flag...  
 Yes, you all hurry forward, always keep advancing,  
 And don't stand still unless god tells you—*Stand still!!*  
 (my translation, emphases in the original)

Progress in society is emphasised by the poet in bold in this stanza. Progress was a concept that was often perceived to be synonymous with evolution, with evolution always seen as advancing to a higher goal. However, further to this, evolution was also seen as regressive. This idea would be used to validate reasons for degeneration in society and this degeneration would also be absorbed by the literary world. Note here in this last line of the poem that Dock acknowledges the existence of some deity that determines the fate of humanity. Is Dock referring to the traditional God or his pantheistic god?

In this paper I have argued that in this poem Dock responded to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. After the presentation of this paper in 2007 the question arose that the poem might be about Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) who was Charles' grandfather. The determining factors for arguing that the poem is about Charles and not Erasmus are: the timing of the poem's publication (that is, just after Charles' death and within the first wave of Darwinism); and the themes the poem covers on natural selection, progress, evolution, religion and science are in themselves related to information post-*Origin*. As indicated by the authoritative evolutionary commentator Ernst Mayr:

[Erasmus] in his *Zoonomia* (1794) indulged in some casual evolutionary speculations. He never amplified them further, and thus they had remarkably little impact on subsequent developments. [...] There is hardly a trace of Erasmus Darwin's ideas in the *Origin*, and Charles Darwin explicitly denied such an influence, even though Darwin's notebooks reflect the reading of *Zoonomia* (Mayr, 1982:339–340).

Mayr also makes it clear that Erasmus did not “anticipate Lamarck, or even that Lamarck got his ideas from him. The belief in an inheritance of acquired characters and other ideas found in both authors were widespread at that period” (Mayr, 1982:340). So it is highly unlikely that the poem was about Erasmus. By 1882, Erasmus' evo-

lutionary writing was overshadowed by that of his grandson Charles; and it would have had no impact on society, science and religion.

The poem shows that Dock, a scientifically minded intellectual, agreed with most Darwinian concepts. This is despite his satirical take on the evolution of humankind from the worm (stanza ten). His validation of the Darwinian tenets is eloquently revealed in the living microscopic world, exhibiting the struggle of existence, transformation and extinction (stanza twelve). Most significantly he accepted the tenet of natural selection which is crucial to Darwin's theory (stanza eleven).

However, due to the traditional religion Dock was exposed to from a child, he was unable to exclude entirely the idea of a god who created the world from nothing (stanza six). Dock held that once the world was created by a divine power then life was able to evolve according to Darwinian theory, that is by way of natural selection (stanza six). Although he acknowledged that Darwinian evolution did not include a Designer-Creator, he embraced a pantheistic approach to the actual evolution, that is god is in everything.

Dock's views on the origin and evolution of life reflect a common trend which many intellectuals had post-*Origin*. Darwinism had rendered science and religion as completely divergent forces by asserting a creation without a Designer-Creator. An attempt to make science and religion converge came in various forms. Many who accepted most of the Darwinian tenets could not come to terms with the absence of a creator, so they embraced a pantheistic approach.

## Finally-who was this elusive Dock?

The pseudonym "Dock", written in English in the Greek journal, is presumably a variant spelling for "Doc" the shortened form of "doctor". Dock could have been involved in the controversy which I mentioned earlier between the University of Athens Medical School and the theologians in the 1880s.

According to the literary commentator Giorgos Valetas, Pavlos Nirvanas (1866–1937), a creative writer and in particular a poet, and also a medical doctor, was writing in the radical and pro-Darwinian journal *Μη Χάνεσαι* in 1884 (Valetas, 1981:7–8). He was writing in the journal as early as 1884 (Delopoulos, 2005:157) under the pseudonym of "Χαχόλος" (which means a Russian peasant or a gawk or bumpkin). Note that Nirvanas was born in Russia. Moreover, Nirvanas' other pseudonyms include "Ιατρός" ("Doctor"), "Herr Doctor", "Δρ Α" ("Dr A"), "Δρ Απ" ("Dr Ap") which all refer to a doctor. Note that the name Pavlos Nirvanas, by which this writer is known, is itself a pseudonym; his real name was Petros Apostolidis. It is possible that Nirvanas may have written this poem at the age of 16 or 17 when he was a medical student at the University of Athens. Nirvanas was also one of the younger members of the New Generation of writers of the '80s.

It is significant to note that in 1895 Nirvanas (as Apostolidis) wrote an article "Επιστήμη και Τέχνη" ("Science and the Arts") (Apostolidis, 1895:25–35). I have included

below most of the opening paragraph of the article as it contributes to the argument that Dock could well have been Nirvanas, and provides a fascinating window into the liveliness of Greek intellectual life in the late nineteenth century:

Ακόμη ενθυμούμαι το φοβερόν σκάνδαλον, το οποίον εγέννησε, προ ολίγων ετών, η ανάπτυξις της δαρβινείου θεωρίας από του πανεπιστημίου μας. Ο καθηγητής της ιατρικής, ο ριψοκινδυνεύσας να γνωρίση προς τους έλληνας φοιτητάς τον νόμον της εξελίξεως, όχι μόνον εκινδύνευσε ν' αφορισθή από την Ιεράν Σύνοδον, ως ο άλλος αθώος συγγραφεύς της “Παπίσσης Ιωάννας”, αλλά με έκπληξιν του εύρεν, ως λέγεται, τας ημέρας εκείνας, κλειστάς τας θύρας των περισσοτέρων πελατών του. Της κοινωνικής αυτής εξεγέρσεως την σημαίαν μη νομίσετε εν τούτοις ότι εκράτουν φανατικοί θρησκομανείς, καλόγηροι και γραϊδία. Μέχρις αυτών δεν είχε φθάση η ηχώ του ανταρτικού κηρύγματος. Της σταυροφορίας την πρωτοπορείαν απετέλει κυρίως ο τρυφερός κόσμος των ονειροπόλων και των υπερευαισθητών, όσοι έβλεπον την ποίησιν της ζωής σβυνομένην υπό την πνοήν των επιστημονικών δαιμονίων.

I still remember the terrible scandal at our university which the exposition of the Darwinian theory generated a few years ago. The professor of medicine, who was at risk by introducing the law of evolution to the Greek students, was not only in danger of being excommunicated by the Holy Synod, like the other innocent author of “Pope Joan”, but to his surprise, it is said, in those days, he found the doors of most of his customers closed to him. Don't think however, this social flag-waving was supported by religious fanatics, monks and little old ladies. The sound of the rebel sermon had not reached them. The delicate world of the day-dreamers and the hypersensitive constituted the vanguard of the crusade — those who saw the poetry of life extinguished by the breath of the scientific geniuses (my translation).

This delightful passage shows the pro-Darwinian Nirvanas was very well aware of and probably associated with the Darwinian controversy, that is, the disputes between the academics of philosophy, medicine and theology at the University of Athens during the period of 1880s.<sup>10</sup> Nirvanas must therefore be seriously considered as the person lying behind the pseudonym Dock.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In the cited passage Nirvanas is referring to Emmanuel Roidis (1836–1904) who wrote the satirical masterpiece *Η Πάπισσα Ιωάννα* (Pope Joan), published in 1866; the novel was condemned by the Greek Orthodox Church. Also Nirvanas reveals in this passage that Darwinism had only been received in Greece by intellectuals and not the broader public.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that in the article following the cited passage, Nirvanas goes on to say that Achilles Paraschos (1838–1885) was a poet who represented “the hypersensitive”, producing poetry which was against science and implying that Paraschos was anti-Darwinian. I have included this information because it was brought to my attention by an academic that Paraschos could be Dock. However the comments by Nirvanas in the article would indicate that this is not so. Further to this, Paraschos does not appear to have had any scientific training.

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